

# The Linacre Quarterly

---

Volume 15 | Number 3

Article 12

---

July 1948

## An Instruction on Baptism

Catholic Physicians' Guild

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

---

### Recommended Citation

Catholic Physicians' Guild (1948) "An Instruction on Baptism," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 15: No. 3, Article 12.  
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol15/iss3/12>

## AN INSTRUCTION ON BAPTISM

It happens very often in hospitals that emergencies arise when those who are not priests must confer baptism. The purpose of the present instruction is to give in very brief form the points that ought to be kept in mind in such emergencies. To explain these points fully would defeat the purpose of the instruction; hence it would be wise for all to read these points over from time to time and to ask for explanations of the points they do not understand.

### 1) *Ordinary method of baptizing:*

Water is poured on the head in such a way that it will flow on the skin, and not merely on the hair; and while the water is being poured these words are pronounced: "I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

The water will more easily flow on the skin if it is poured on the forehead. The same person who pours the water should pronounce the words.

### 2) *Conditional baptism:*

The subject for valid baptism should be a living person, not yet validly baptized, and (if an adult) willing to receive baptism. When there is a doubt about any of these three requisites (i.e. life, previous baptism, or willingness), the baptism should be conferred *conditionally*. The condition in all cases is, "if you can be baptized;" and the complete formula is: "If you can be baptized, I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

### 3) *Conscious adults:* (Canon 752, par. 2.)

A conscious adult who wishes to be baptized should be helped to make acts of faith and of contrition for his sins before the baptism is conferred. The act of faith should embrace at least these four truths: the existence of God, the fact that God rewards the good and punishes the wicked, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, and the mystery of the Incarnation. Excellent prayers for this use, as well as on other occasions, may be found on the card published by the Apostolate to Assist the Dying.

### 4) *Unconscious adults:* (Canon 752, par. 3.)

a) If an unconscious dying adult has already asked for baptism, he should be baptized absolutely.

b) If he has not clearly asked, but has given some probable sign that he wanted to be baptized (e.g. by showing interest in the Church), he should be baptized conditionally.

c) If he is unconscious and entirely unknown—i.e. if nothing is known about his desire for baptism or whether he has ever been baptized, it is at least commendable to baptize him conditionally. (Cf.: "Shall We Baptize Dying Adults?", by Gerald Kelly, S.J., in *Review for Religious*, IV, 49-59; and "The Hospital Chaplain and the Administration of Baptism and Penance," by Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, CXVIII, 254-64; McFadden, *Medical Ethics for Nurses*, 201-02.)

### 5) *Baptism of fetus that cannot survive:*

a) Every such fetus, even an embryo, if visible at all, must be

baptized immediately, unless it is certainly dead. (Cf. canon 747.) *For this purpose*, the only certain sign of death is noticeable corruption (putrefaction, decomposition, offensive odor, maceration, discoloration of flesh, etc.). If there is no clear sign of corruption, the fetus should be considered as at least probably alive, and should be baptized conditionally.

b) If a fetus is delivered enclosed in the membranes, the membranes must be ruptured before baptism is conferred.

c) If there is time and opportunity, baptism by *immersion* is the surer way of baptizing a fetus expelled during the early stages of pregnancy. This is accomplished by immersing the fetus completely in water and, after breaking the membranes, pronouncing the words of baptism, conditionally or absolutely, as the case requires, and at the same time moving the fetus in the water.

#### 6) *Baptism during difficult delivery:*

a) Baptism should be conferred immediately when there is danger that the child will not survive complete delivery.

b) In the case of head presentation, baptism should be conferred on the head, and unconditionally.

c) In the case of other presentation, baptism should be conferred conditionally on the part presented, and then repeated conditionally on the head after delivery. The reason for this is that baptism is considered certainly valid only when conferred on the head.

d) In these cases of difficult delivery the baptism should be conferred by the doctor, nurse, or Sister, as may be judged best according to circumstances.

#### 7) *Intra-uterine baptism:*

a) When there is danger that the fetus will die before it can be even partially delivered, it should, when possible, be baptized *conditionally* while in the uterus. If it is later successfully delivered, or if there is at least a head presentation, the baptism should be repeated conditionally on the head, because there is always some doubt about the validity of baptism within the uterus.

b) Intra-uterine baptism can be conferred only after the membranes have ruptured.

c) For baptizing a fetus within the uterus, a sterile bulb syringe containing sterile water is inserted so that the water will flow directly on the fetus. The words of conditional baptism should be pronounced by the same person who is causing the water to flow and while the water is flowing. The person who baptizes should have the medical knowledge necessary to eliminate the danger of infection.

8) *When a mother dies in pregnancy* and the fetus is judged to be at least probably alive, it should be immediately extracted and baptized. Before doing this, one should have the consent, at least reasonably presumed, of the proper relatives.

#### 9) *Monsters:*

a) The general rule is that a monster is to be treated in the same way as a normal fetus.

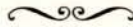
b) If there is some doubt whether a monstrosity is more than one person, one being should be baptized absolutely (if certainly alive), conditionally (if doubtfully alive) and the other possible beings should be baptized conditionally. (Cf. canon 748.)

When there is difficulty about applying the rule just given, the



problem can be solved this way: Pour water over the entire monstrosity, or immerse it (moving it in the water), and pronounce the words of baptism *with the intention of baptizing as many persons as are present*. For example: a

nurse immerses the monstrosity in water and, while moving it in the water, she says: "I baptize you (meaning 'all of you, if there be more than one') in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."



## DISPOSAL OF AMPUTATED MEMBERS

*What is the duty of hospital authorities with regard to the disposal of amputated members of the body?*

This question could be answered rather briefly. Yet I have been asked frequently about the disposal of amputated members; and correspondence and consultation with several other moralists show that they have had a similar experience. It seems, therefore, not only that the question is practical, but also the material for answering it is not readily available to hospital authorities. For this reason I believe that a rather thorough discussion of the problem is in order.

### The General Law

The only general law of the Church pertinent to the present topic is succinctly stated in canon 1203, the first of the canons on Christian burial: "The bodies of the faithful deceased must be buried; and their cremation is reprobated."

This law expresses an ancient Christian custom. From earliest times the Christians buried their dead because they considered this the most respectful way of treating the human body, especially a body that had been a temple of the Holy Ghost. Cremation was looked upon as unbecoming. Moreover, at various times cremation acquired anti-Christian and heretical

cal connotations. For instance, some of the early persecutors had the bodies of martyrs burned to express contempt for the hope in the resurrection; hence Christian burial acquired the opposite connotation, namely, of profession of faith and hope in the resurrection. In more recent times, according to a strong statement of the Congregation of the Holy Office, the enemies of Christianity have praised and propagated the practice of cremation in order to pave the way to the acceptance of materialism.

This law, commanding burial and forbidding cremation, is the ordinary rule. The cremation of bodies is permitted when the public welfare demands it, for example, in time of pestilence—an exception which is explicitly mentioned in the instruction of the Holy Office just referred to. It is understood, of course, that in such cases cremation is divested of its anti-Christian and heretical connotations.

The law refers primarily to entire bodies. However, in the sources of canon 1203 we are referred to a reply of the Holy Office which dealt specifically with the disposal of amputated members. Since we shall be particularly concerned with this reply during the remainder of our discussion, it will be well to consider